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Université de Montréal

**The Eroticization of Space and Language through Desire in  
Gail Scott's My Paris**

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*For my family*

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## **Résumé de synthèse**

Mon mémoire de maîtrise intitulé « The Eroticization of Space and Language through Desire in Gail Scott's *My Paris* » porte sur l'étude de la question du langage et de l'espace littéraire à travers l'analyse des manifestations du désir dans l'œuvre de Gail Scott. Cette étude interroge la validité du phénomène du désir présent dans le langage. Dans le cadre d'une littérature expérimentale empruntée de l'idéal du postmoderne, *My Paris* analyse et explore les différentes manières d'occuper l'espace, d'affirmer son propre désir de transcrire son sexe ou sexualité dans le texte et de créer ainsi un nouveau langage littéraire. Cette étude vise également à démontrer que Gail Scott dans *My Paris* n'a pas pour autant délaissé le fond dans sa quête et intérêt naissants à affirmer la question de la forme en défiant toutes les règles jusque là imposées, pour ainsi dire, à l'écriture en général. Elle n'hésite pas à détrôner la syntaxe et la grammaire monopolisante et patriarchale de son texte créant ainsi des effets nouveaux, innovateurs jamais soupçonnés avant.

Mon mémoire est donc divisé en deux chapitres : Dans le premier chapitre, j'expose les points de convergence et de ralliement entre les approches respectives de Gail Scott et de Walter Benjamin. À travers l'idée du passage je tente de les relier et au même temps d'affirmer l'identité de chacun. Cette partie vise également à exposer la dynamique textuelle qu'utilise Gail Scott dans *My Paris* qui consiste entre autres à s'inspirer tant soit peu de la technique de montage, qui à son tour produit un effet de fragmentation sur le plan scénique qui se reflète aussi sur le plan stylistique.

Dans mon deuxième chapitre, je propose d'analyser le style d'écriture propre à Gail Scott, j'en dévoile les caractéristiques et les changements opérés au niveau de la langue et par conséquent du langage lui-même. Je mets aussi l'emphasis sur les tendances linguistiques et stylistiques utilisées par Gail Scott.

Ma conclusion peut aussi être considérée comme une partie en soi étant donné qu'elle aborde la question du désir, l'essence même de l'érotique. Brièvement, je parle du désir évanescent, le Paris qui ne cesse de s'échapper de la mémoire du narrateur et de Gertrude Stein dans *Tender Buttons*. Je signale aussi les instances textuelles où le désir est le plus marquant et marqué dans *My Paris* et je cite les exemples des orgasmes et des eczémas. Ainsi, ma conclusion montre que le désir est constamment décelable et omniprésent dans le l

## **ABSTRACT**



This thesis entitled « The Eroticization of Space and Language through Desire in Gail Scott's *My Paris* » studies the issues of language and literary space through the analysis of the diverse manifestations of desire in Gail Scott's novel. This study questions the validity of the phenomenon of desire which is present in language. Within the context of an experimental literature that borrows from and draws a lot on the realm of the postmodern, *My Paris* explores the different ways to fill in a given literary space and to ascertain one's desire to inscribe one's sexuality into the text, thus helping to come up with or create a new literary language. This study also means to show that Gail Scott in *My Paris* in no way neglects the question of the content. In her quest and interest to confirm the issue of form, she is going adamantly against all the pre-set rules that have so far been incumbent on the writing of a text in general. She is willing to overthrow syntax and grammar rules and to do away with their monopolising quality and patriarchal dimensions. By removing or operating changes on them she creates all through her text new effects never to be suspected before.

My thesis is divided into two chapters : the common points between Gail Scott and Walter Benjamin's approaches to literature are played out in the first chapter. My attempt through the mention of the 'passage' or *arcade* issue is to bring them together and at the same time this helps me dig out the unique literary identity of each figure. The same part also means to shed more light on the textual dynamics used by Gail Scott in *My Paris*. This dynamics draws on

Benjamin's technique of *montage*, which in turn produces an effect of fragmentation that is not only reflected on a visual level but also on a stylistic level.

In my second chapter, I proceed to analyse the writing style that is peculiar to Gail Scott. I also show its different features. In this part I am also concerned with the displaying of the changes operated in the text, namely on the linguistic level. Moreover, I put the emphasis on the linguistic and stylistic idiosyncrasies that are used by Gail Scott in her writing.

My conclusion can also be considered as a part on its own as it deals with the question of desire which is in turn at the origin of *the Erotic*. In a brief way, I speak about the elusive quality of the desire that informs Paris, the same Paris that keeps slipping in and out of the narrator's memory and imagination. In my conclusion, I also point to the similarities existing between some instances in Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* and Gail Scott's *My Paris*. Besides, I lay some emphasis on several textual examples whereby desire is most conspicuous. Orgasms and eczemas explicitly serve the issue of desire. Thus, my conclusion shows that desire is constantly omnipresent in language.

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## **Introduction**

In order to have a clear view of what the future holds in store for language as such and how it came to be conceived of today, and in order to be able to speak of the advent of a series of experimental literary projects, one needs to consider the principles of postmodernist fiction. Indeed, the elements that characterize metafiction and metanarrative in general constitute a cornerstone for what is often referred to as *New Narrative*, a term I borrow from Robert Glück. Itself being a revolutionary literary trend, postmodernism questions the orthodox values of the “Master Narrative” or “le Grand Récit” (in using this term I am indebted to Jean-François Lyotard), and at times it goes so far as to undermine the former by means of such powerful postmodernist theories as *Deconstruction*, *Decentering*, *Randomness*, and *Discontinuity*, among others.

In fact, in *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel: A Reader*, by Nicole Bran, David Lodge points to this fact quite significantly when discussing Beckett’s postmodernist style of writing: “[T]he general idea of *the world resisting the compulsive attempts of the human consciousness to interpret it*, of the human predicament being in some sense “absurd”, *does underlie a good deal of postmodernist writing*.” (my emphasis added.) (255). Resistance is indeed a keyword.

In fact, the world will not yield its meaning to human consciousness, especially that it is absurd and pointless. On this, I strongly agree with David Lodge. However, it would also be useful to think of this quote the other way around. In fact, in *New Narrative*, it is human consciousness itself which resists both the word (or language) and consequently the world. Although *New Narrative* does certainly descend from the theory

of postmodernism and inherits some basic principles set by it, it does not seek to undermine or deconstruct Master Narratives (since that has already been achieved by postmodernism) as much as it indulges in a logic of creation of its own. The best motive for advancing this stance is the capacity of *New Narrative* to launch new literary projects and be able at the same time to think about itself as a new form of writing, to question its own existence. This type of new literature seems to be self-referential.

Consequently, it does not seem to need to refer to something outside of itself as opposed to postmodernism which posits modernism as a starting point. The latter serves to justify the revolutionary aspect claimed by postmodernism as it acquired maturity and a strong capacity for self-awareness and self-criticism.

In my thesis, I intend to examine the ways in which a new generation of experimental writers explore narrative. More specifically, my study will be centered on Gail Scott's *My Paris*. In order to achieve this, I will read this novel in the light of both Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and the anthology *Biting the Error*. In my conclusion, I will consider some affinities between Scott's *My Paris* and Gertrude Stein's *Paris France*, with an additional focus on her experimental text *Tender Buttons*.

Therefore, the concern of my thesis is to show that Gail Scott's intention to establish a new mode of writing is always at issue. By this, I mean that no literary text can totally be self-generative, self-referential, and sealed. It cannot be detached from being read in conversation or against other texts; indeed to be read within a network of *other* texts.

The text is inevitably caught in a plurality of alternatives, texts, subtexts and even contexts. Hence, the power of *intertextuality*. The narrator of *My Paris* strives in a way to escape this almost systematic relegation of what she says to what other writers

before her have written about Paris, including Benjamin, Breton, Baudelaire, Haussmann, Stein & Co as Scott sometimes likes to playfully put it. These symbolic characters keep dwelling in her novel, peeping through the interstices of the written text in a cheeky way. “Ils habitent le texte” in both senses, they haunt the text as it were. She will ultimately find herself trapped, writing in tension.

Although Gail Scott manages to a certain extent to “exorcise” such unwanted presences and discard their anxiety of influence through such literary devices as parody and subversion, one has the impression that *they* are the ones who will win out in the end. As a matter of fact, they resist captivity and containment both by Gail Scott and the text; they refuse to yield and be tamed. Thus, they become even more present as the narrator strives to relegate them to a remote past, a dream-like sphere shrouded with nostalgia.

To put it differently, it is interesting to read Gail Scott through Gertrude Stein but, conversely, it is also important to make the opposite move and attempt to read, in a subversive way, Gertrude Stein and Walter Benjamin through Gail Scott, even though my primary focus is to study *My Paris*. Furthermore, this will allow me to pin down the ghostly presence and the palimpsests- to use Gérard Genette’s term- in the text of *My Paris*. I will show that this is the site where *writing in Tension/ Intention* stems from.

## **Chapter I**

**Gail Scott's *My Paris* read through Walter Benjamin**



A Dragonfly Caught by the Neon Light at Night, Desire Caught by Space: The Aesthetics of Space and Desire.

By way of introducing this chapter, I will begin with a quotation from *My Paris*, which rightly enough presupposes that the reader has some historical knowledge about Paris. It is useful to have at least a basic knowledge, a brief overview of the history of Paris in 19th and at the turn of 20th century in order to make sense of Gail Scott's *My Paris*, and to subsequently make the link between the way Scott transposes the notion of flâneur onto her narrator and the way Benjamin conceived of the flâneur. – Scott makes this notion modern by taking it to another level:

...Anyway-returning to divan. And lifting heavy volume of B's Paris, Capitale du XIXe . From turquoise roxy-painted bedside table. Subtitle Le livre des passages. Passagenwerk in German. Not yet available in English. Therefore weighing the more delightfully on wrists. **Not** a real history. Rather-vast collection of 19<sup>th</sup>-century quotes and anecdotes. Initially seeming huge pile of detritus. But-on looking closer. More like montage. Possibly assembled using old surrealist *trick*. *Of free association*. I opening at contents' list. "**A**"-Passages- glass-roofed arcades, malls. Hawking 19<sup>th</sup> century's new imperial luxury. Juxtaposed

on “**B**”-Mode. Each new season. Ironizing time. Next to “**C**”-Antique Paris, catacombs, demolitions-Paris’s underpinnings. Pointing to “**D**”-l’ennui-Eternal return. Present tense of dandy. Hovering over “**E**”-Haussmannisation, combats des barricades-Haussmann’s wide boulevards. Versus the people. Progress’s double coin. Segueing into “**J**”-Poet Baudelaire. First modern. Peer of “**K**”-Flâneur-whose initial post French-revolutionary languor not ultimately resisting rising capitalist market. “**X/Y**”-Marx-realism. Next to *Photography...* Social movements. Dolls. Automatons. A person could wander here for months.

(Scott 18)

The overall vision offered to the reader by the narrator of *My Paris* stands as an indirect invitation to go and visit other epochs, modes of thinking and perspectives through the device of intertextuality. It leads us to take a closer look at the conditions and general framework within which ‘Bohemia’, and later the concept of *flâneur*, arose.

In *Paris Bohème: Culture et Politique Aux Marges de la Vie Bourgeoise 1830-1930*<sup>1</sup>, Jerrold Seigel presents us with a full, comprehensive analysis of what Paris experienced during this century. He gives us an account- following a precise chronological, historical order- of the tumultuous period of the revolution of 1848. The revolution affected France among other countries, and had had a strong impact throughout the rest of the world. The motive for the political turmoil and social upheaval in France was to overthrow the Louis-Philippe monarchy in Paris. This certainly was a painful period but at the same time it indirectly led to the emergence of many types of bohemia. Bohemia

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that this book has been translated from English into French by Odette Guitard.

at that time bore many dimensions, namely political, social, and personal. The bohemian attitude characterized the writers who had some sense of fancy and eccentricity. Charles Baudelaire advocated and often contributed to the creation of what came to be called the art of *Bohemianism* or simply *Bohemia*. In fact, Baudelaire was one of the first who came up with the word “Bohème”. He sees it is an unconscious art held by artists and men who spend most of their time browsing the streets. Indeed, Walter Benjamin, in his theories on the flâneur, draws a lot on Baudelaire’s conception.

Nevertheless, one must not be misled by the modern view that all Bohemians were necessarily rejects or social outcasts. Real bohemians, as has been suggested by Wismann in *Walter Benjamin et Paris*, may be either prostitutes, men who are selling newspapers in the streets and who are sandwiched between two advertisements or placards, (the latter are sticking advertisements on the back and front of their bodies, and came to be known as ‘L’homme Sandwich’ in French) and of course the Flâneur. The prostitute, the sandwichman and the Flâneur hold a special relationship to the space they occupy. They decorate and accessorize this space but are no longer subjects in it. On the contrary, they become “objectified”, losing any form of subjectivity. Thus, they melt into space, turning into mere commodities.

In trying to revive the myth of “the eternal flâneur” in *My Paris*, Gail Scott almost unwittingly stumbles on an altogether different space, the existence of which she would never have suspected before, had she not undertaken the writing *My Paris*. This is a space peculiar to the nature of her novel. Indeed, she makes a kind of back and forth movement through space and time in her peripatetic walk through Paris. In *Queer Constellations*, Dianne Chisholm refers to *My Paris* as one of: “the literary experiments

that appeared to fuse yesterday's flâneur and today's cruising subject in a queer characterization of the late metropolitan era" (Chisholm 145). According to Chisholm, "Home of the illustrious Passages, Paris is the birthplace of the flâneur, the archetypal urban wanderer." (145). For her, *My Paris* illustrates what we would qualify as writing in tension. This might mean writing that keeps the traditional figure of the flâneur in mind and yet makes room for the rising identity of the cruising subject. Even as the modern queer cruising subject is central to the novel, the flâneur keeps resisting the advancing flow of time and re-emerges in between the lines of *My Paris*. He keeps on reappearing in a most paradoxical and unexpected way- from within the consciousness of the collective memory related to the history of Paris.

Now, I am going to look at how Gail Scott conceives of *space* as both a space for memory and a space imbued with desire. In fact these two elements seem to work in perfect harmony. The most obvious feature that could be attributed to the notion of space in *My Paris* is that it is a space for wandering. However, one is tempted to ask the following question: what is wandering all about? And what is the purpose of wandering or "flâner"? Is there any goal or rationale behind it at all? I think that there can be no conclusive answer to these questions. As the title of this section suggests, space and desire are closely related. Consequently, wandering or browsing through the streets of Paris is motivated by a strong, inner feeling or desire to recover past sensations. An/other desire is to see through what is laying there under the form of architectural remnants and debris: the vestiges of a culture in the case of *My Paris*.

The art of flânerie seems all to be about rambling incessantly around the streets of Paris. This rambling, random style finds its echo in the shape and rhythm of the sentences

which inhabit Gail Scott's *My Paris*. In keeping with this idea, there seems to be a perfect parallelism between one's immediate experience and the vehicle, the form of art in which the latter is rendered. In fact, as the strolling narrator cruises the space around her, she *registers* certain constellations, sequences of images. These images are disparate, but they come to her as an assembled network of fragmented things. This tempo of a series of images lodged in a kaleidoscope affects the way the writer/narrator turns her experience into art. Thus, the subject may be said to experience the space surrounding her. She lets herself go in a most generous way. The experience is close to mysticism.

The narrator of *My Paris* engages in a perpetual kind of dance with the space she occupies. The subject within the framework of this unique experience of "flânerie" is made infinitesimally small when compared to the surface occupied by *space*. He is turned into a petty thing completely absorbed and engulfed by the space he stands within. The stroller is also thrown into an intimate experience of penetrating space, almost revelling in unfolding it, as though he were stripping the historical veils off the streets and the passages of Paris. To my mind, this passage in *My Paris* stands as a perfect illustration of *Desire* being inscribed in space:

Today might try and find one of those old 19<sup>th</sup>-century passages. B likening to ghost stepping right through city blocks. They're everywhere S saying. Curved arm gesturing. To the left bank. To the right. Brown eyes ironic. Regarding my desire. For her beloved Paris. Where she has hidden. Thrown pavés, paving stones. Been a city

worker. Fine profile turning this way or that. Always seeking new streets to step down. As if a walk were a caress (my emphasis, Scott 19).

One can already sense that the narrator has developed a special kind of relationship to the environment she is in. The narrator also speaks of “moist alleys of desire”(19); another example of how desire constitutes an intrinsic part of the space which contains it. In other words, space generates desire.

Nevertheless, one may still consider the act of *flânerie* as a way to resist a hegemonic, dominant culture. In keeping with this idea, Wismann in *Walter Benjamin et Paris* claims that Benjamin assimilated the Flâneur to the lower-classes. Indeed, the Flâneur is reminiscent of bohemianism and the world of bohemia: he is closer to the margins than to the mainstream values of the bourgeois society which prevailed in Paris at that time. “Flâner” is also a word that is highly charged with political meaning. One can recognize the flâneur in depictions of the artist, the hashisch smoker, and the allegorist. In *Walter Benjamin et Paris*, Heinz Wismann writes about Benjamin :

Le fumeur de Haschisch n'est pas le seul: celui qui se réveille du rêve, l'allégoriste, le collectionneur, le flâneur, celui qui attend- tous regardent obliquement, de côté. Ils ne fixent pas leur objet, car ils savent que, pour voir, ils doivent regarder juste à côté de lui. La position de seuil, d'après sa signification tectonique, permet un large regard des deux côtés, elle rend possible une perspective fractionnée par de nombreuses

fissures qui est la variante spatiale de la conscience fractionnée par de nombreuses fissures. (128-29)

This is reminiscent of Benjamin's dialectics of seeing and the paradigm site/sight. Indeed, I can imagine the flâneur walking through the streets like a boat that rips the ocean in two, thus causing a *caesura* (a rupture) both in time and space. While walking along, the flâneur never fixes, or stares at, one particular object; he would rather look at a distant point in space- in a timeline ahead of him- thus tracing his trajectory. Only then is he entitled to feel that the attraction of the scattered objects around him draw ever closer from both sides of "the passage" and only then can he invoke and bring into play, as it were, a constellation of objects, anecdotes and periods in time. In "Paris Diary" (1930), Benjamin states the following: "As I walked along, my thoughts became all jumbled up as in a kaleidoscope. Old elements disappeared, and unknown ones came stumbling up- figures of all shapes and sizes. If one remained, it was called a "sentence"."(351).

However, the broadening of the visual field of the "flâneur" also culminates in some sort of fissure. This phenomenon of *fissure* takes place at the same time that the flâneur feels an unquenchable desire to catch sight of everything around him. However, since it is practically impossible to have an exclusive view of everything around one, the Flâneur will be able to see only fragments of what is there to be seen. One can already ascertain the quasi-impossibility of human sight to catch all the minutiae of a landscape: perspective- which requires that sight coincide with space- is all the more difficult to contemplate, as the landscape in question is

imbued with both historical and political nuances. The eyes of the flâneur could never “get the whole picture”, yet they are still able to pierce through some of its fragmentary aspects.

Sight has the partial ability to cover, map and retrace the diverse subtleties of space. But if sight and space can never exist in a complete relation of superposition, what about art and its validity as a medium for rendering the immediacy of experience? Letting oneself be absorbed by space culminates in the mind’s raising of images and re/creation of a subjective past. At a certain point in *My Paris*, Gail Scott in turn raises the magical dust of history-a history which has been appropriately termed “phantasmagoria” by Benjamin: a history which is subjective as it is proper to the way her senses have been affected by the space through which she is evolving:

I getting up and strolling. Midst shiny giant prams. Wheels like coaches. Still pushed by nannies in uniform. As in Marcel’s time. Trailing little girls in longish tailored coats. Exquisite dresses in gap of flaps. Along paths arcing into shadows of ornate balconies. Paris’s finest real estate. Where Marcel-perhaps after tea with Charlus-once leaning. Watching boys on rollerblades. Racing past statue of Musset. Chopin at piano. Muse in swoon at feet. Female angel distributing flowers over. Whilst careful gardeners raking. Grooming. Sweeping sidewalk gutters. In sandbox one contemporaneous-style au pair. Short blonde hair and single earring. Possibly one of “us”. (117)

On reading this passage, one feels that no sooner an image is about to be fully visualized than another one “leaps frogs over” it, jumps out on it-so to speak-, and this pattern of images



jumping over on one another is sustained all the way through the passage. As readers, we are left in the end with bits and pieces, fragments, but never do we seem to be given the satisfaction of the whole image. Once again, it is as though Gail Scott were relating a film, or a scene of a film in which she focuses on the minutiae and different impressions that such an image conjures up in the mind, rather than the image itself. In the way she relates to the reality of writing, the narrator of *My Paris* removes the mystical aura that has heretofore surrounded the authoritative figure of the writer. The notion of *Desire* comes to be reinforced within the dialectics of the reader/ writer relationship.

As Erin Elizabeth Wunker puts it in *Borders of Becoming: An Examination Into Absence and Desire for Self and Subjectivity in Anne Carson's Men in the Off Hours and Gail Scott's Main Brides*: "The writer (Scott) will first be encountered as a desiring subject who displaces her desires on the (absent) reader. Likewise, the reader of Scott's text will be treated as a desiring subject who displaces his/her desires on the (absent) spectre of the writer." (56). In this dialectics of exchange of Desire, Wunker quotes Derrida. I find the reference to Derrida very significant in so far as it offers us an insight into Scott's conception of how desire is worked out through the space of writing. As a matter of fact, in *Spaces Like Stairs*, Scott draws our attention to the notion of desire. It holds an overriding importance for comprehending the dialogue that occurs between the reader, who expects to find the fulfilment of his craving to fill in the gaps in a malicious and astute kind of narrator, and the writer.

In making meaning, space is waiting to be filled with life, to be injected by the semen of writing in what may be referred to as fill-in-the blank kind of fiction. For Scott, however, the process reaches its apex at what she has termed “the uncanny edge of language”: “If writing is the act of always seeking more understanding, more lucidity, prescriptive directives have no place in our trajectory towards the uncanny edge of language.” (Wunker 62). One can understand this notion of an “uncanny edge of language” only by turning to Derrida’s definition of “the borderline”, a term akin to the one used by Gail Scott to point to that almost “third-dimensional” space, that ever-shifting wave, upon which both protagonists, reader and writer, get in touch :

... This borderline- I call it dynamis because of its force, its power, as well as its virtual and mobile potency- is neither active nor passive, neither inside nor outside. It is most especially not a thin line, an invisible or indivisible trait lying between the enclosures of philosophemes, on the one hand, and the life of an author already identifiable behind the name, on the other. (Scott 5)

There is a power and intensity with which Scott brings together literary and historical figures in one small passage or paragraph, a stunning condensation/ constellation, a narrative feat that is well achieved. It is one of her most remarkable tour de forces. The consistency of such a passage lies in the ostensibly inconsistent chain of associations between characters, events and figures from different epochs and times coming together on the page in order to exist and be re/presented in the shared space occupied by a sentence. In this respect, the Flâneur’s mind acts

as a museum that stores immediate impressions and counter-balances this activity by restoring feelings.

It functions more specifically like the Musée Grévin- a site that is recurrently mentioned in *My Paris*- where one witnesses a paraphernalia of sensations and displacements in just one quick, sweeping glance, thus achieving a comprehensive view. Chopin, Alfred Musset, Marcel Proust and others have never been as close to each other as when they are randomly reassembled on this page. Only a period comes between them. A period is in this sense both a period in time and a “punctus”, a grammatical period, announcing the semblance, the simulacrum of an end: a caesura/ rupture between what came before and what will be there next. It also feels like the author is trying hard to follow a continuous, stable line of writing, a single string of successive ideas, but the narrator’s prompting, overflowing and “uncontainable” reminiscences will always end up distracting the author from getting her initial intentions onto the page. So, no matter how hard the latter tries to avoid discontinuity and disjunctions, she will have to face a helpless constellation of mixed ideas.

This doubling of the self in a writing subject who is constantly displaced by a kind of counter-subject is fundamental to *writing in tension*. This whole movement creates “a subject of desire”, to use Judith Butler’s terminology. To put it differently, the narrator displaces the initial intentions projected by the writer and in the manner of an intruding presence begins creating anew. It is as if we had, in this act of displacement, a voice doubly checking itself, an initial

desire of the writer which is being written off by an overwhelming narratorial presence: the Flâneur's.

The author is outdistanced by the narrator, her possession, indeed her creation. Hence, the fragmentary nature of the modern writing subject, who is trying to write himself but who ends up effacing the act of writing itself. This double movement or displacement of the author by the narrator is what constitutes the special feature of the literary experiment as it relates to *New Narrative* aesthetics. Dianne Chisholm refers to the spiritual practice whereby the flâneur experiences a total surrender to the embrace of the city. In fact, "the art of losing oneself in the city is still in play, so that he continues to drift through an ambience of porosity and to absorb the fine details of his surroundings." (147). Here, she refers to the flâneur in Benjamin's Paris.

However, a question arises at this stage: if, according to Chisholm, it is hard to draw a clear-cut line between memory and fantasy or imagination, where does the description of the past as collective memory begin, and when exactly does this description start in the narrative? As memory's counterpart, where does fantasy or imagination begin? My answer is that the two are inextricably interwoven. Memory and imagination go hand in hand in the writings of both Benjamin and Gail Scott. After all, imagination is the activity of dreaming. However, are we to conceive of dream as a one-way activity oriented only towards the projection of a plan in a future time?

Dreaming in the classic sense is first and foremost projected towards the future, nevertheless it can also be viewed as an inherent part of the realm of memory. In the most simplistic terms, dreaming can be associated, grammatically speaking, with both the past and the future. For instance, one can say in an unproblematic way: "I dream of becoming a star(dust)", while another person would say: "Yesterday, I dreamt that I was strolling through the city of Paris." As we can see, both sentences are semantically and syntactically correct. Yet, the ambiguity arises from the very fact that dreams can be associated with both past and future. This raises some questions for our analysis of the peripatetic activity of walking through Paris.

There is a clear contrast of movement. Indeed, while one is walking on ahead, stepping forward, thoughts and self are drawn backwards, so mind and body are drawn in completely opposite directions as though some sort of esoteric presence is sadistically pulling the strings from above in contrary directions. In this respect, I find the title of Gail Scott's compilation of essays *Spaces Like Stairs* very suggestive. Indeed, an image comes to mind to illustrate what this dialectics of movement is all about: the flâneur puts one foot after the other in an ever-forward movement; he has no other choice in his act of penetrating space but to go forward. This will ensure his survival. It is exactly as if the flâneur were climbing 'escalators'. If they are going down, and the flâneur wants to go up, he will desperately be heading forward while stairs- the space against which he is fighting symbolically-will always lead him back.

This Sisyphus-like situation may also be likened to the ambivalent relationship between the intention of a writer and the tension brought about by the intervention of a narrator:

an alternative subject brought to existence through writing, and who will inevitably try to challenge the writer and efface her/his initial existence, mainly through resistance and through endorsing the personality of the flâneur. This is the reason why the narrator /flâneur figure keeps popping out –not without some risk of being crossed out- just like the leitmotifs of “eczema” and “orgasms”, which keep recurring in the narrative. Leitmotifs may be thought of as offering a possibility for an alternative to writing without “anomalies”, an alternative to writing with strict conventions in mind. However, do memory and dreaming amount in the end to the same thing? And if not, where do the differences lie?

I think that the sum of such binaries as memory and dream, history and imagination, past and representation is *phantasmagoria*. Indeed, the line between what the mind is exposed to and what it wants to see and recreate, from a subjective point of view, is very thin. By virtue of being a precarious line of demarcation, it culminates in what we may call “an archaeology of feelings”, not history. The desire of the narrator behind the premeditated intention to fuse memory with imagination originates in a repressed “id” which wants to displace history by bringing it closer to personal experience. In this way, the narrator becomes an actor, a protagonist of this history. This feeling may also be ascribed to a repressed desire or even guilt in which the narrator/flâneur feels that his imagination is calling upon him to contribute -even if fictitiously- to the enactment of history from scratch.

All of these assumptions lead me to speculate about the possibility of inventing history, however absurd this may seem. Nevertheless, if memory is to be coupled with

imagination, one expects that such an expression as “inventing history” might be tenable and completely valid. As in premonitory dreams, and like a sandwoman, the narrator of *My Paris* breathes life into the different historical sites that marked the Paris of the nineteenth-century. She makes them acquire a life of their own by appealing to the impulse which animated the city of Paris, the same one that she has been feeling all through her own experience. This notion of dream or “phantasmagoria” can be extended to the experience lived by the flâneur while he is walking through the “passage” or “arcade”. This situation is best accounted for in Wismann’s *Walter Benjamin et Paris*, where he cites some of Benjamin’s statements in the *Passagen Werk* :

Le chemin qui nous mène de passage en passage est en fin de compte, lui aussi, un tel chemin de fantômes, sur lequel les portes cèdent et les murs reculent. » (in *Walter Benjamin et Paris* 180). Benjamin further substantiates this by suggesting that the dream becomes the metaphor of the arcade or “passage” and that the passage, by being devoid of external space, is reminiscent of dream and becomes its allegory.

(180)

This transposition of dreams onto the immediate experience of the flâneur is posited by Wismann when he implies that nothing would attract Benjamin’s attention as a flâneur walking through the streets of the big city as much as what has been haunting his nights.(181). Therefore, one can notice the extent to which the notion of dream is important to the construction of the flâneur/ cruising subject. However, it is also important to point to the

evolution of the concept of “flânerie”. In Benjamin’s earlier works as “Haschisch in Marseilles” (1932), one had to go through some sort of a “*second état*”- namely through having recourse to Baudelairian *paradis artificiels*- in order to access the state of the flâneur and heighten the experience to the fullest. Dianne Chisholm draws our attention to the fact that: “(...) Benjamin impersonates the surrealist flâneur, mixing narcotics with sleep-walking as a recipe for perceptivity.” (146). In stating this, she indirectly refers to Benjamin’s “Haschisch in Marseilles”:

In that little harbour bar, the hashish then began to exert its canonical magic with a primitive sharpness that I had scarcely felt until then. For it made me into a physiognomist, or at least a contemplator of physiognomies, and I underwent something unique in my experience: I positively fixed my gaze on the face that I had around me.... It was, above all, men’s faces that had begun to interest me. Now began the game, which I played for quite a while, of recognizing someone I knew in every face. (Benjamin 675)

As Chisholm suggests in *Queer Constellations*, ““Paris” is the drug that illuminates the role played by city semiotics in conducting the daily life of a dreaming collective” (Chisholm 146). In keeping with this idea, the narrator of *My Paris* writes: “Paris a drug. P saying on phone. Yes Paris a drug. A woman.”(125). We may link this to Wismann’s discussion of Benjamin’s prostituée, “l’homme sandwich” and the flâneur. Thus, through the device of metaphor, the narrator in *My Paris* directly associates Paris with the history of the drugs it used



to be associated with, thus, marvellously short-cutting history. The power of three words- such as in “Paris a drug” and “Paris a woman”- to encompass and call to mind a whole span of time, a history, is worth noting. The words are reminiscent of drugs in “le Quartier Latin”, and prostitution in places such as “Place Pigalle” and “le Marais”. The commodification of such conceptual phenomena holds a significant importance as well. Again, this draws our attention to the fact that the reader is constantly called upon to expand on/ fill in gaps in meaning. These gaps in meaning also have their equivalents at the level of structure and through the stylistics of writing. Short, convulsive, and spasmodic phrases or sequences are, rhythmically speaking, pregnant with meaning.

The modern, contemporaneous flâneur seems to be getting his/her intoxication from elsewhere. Drugs and narcotics no longer lead him to experience that state of ecstasy. Instead, it is “Paris” which takes over the role of the object of desire. In this regard, Chisholm quotes from *A Berlin Chronicle*:

I tell myself it had to be Paris, where the walls and the quays, the asphalt surfaces, the collections and the rubbish, the railings and the squares, the arcades and the kiosks, teach a language so singular that our relations to people attain, in the solitude encompassing us in our immersion in that world of things, the depths of a sleep in which the dream image waits to show the people their true faces. (614)

Benjamin also uses another strategy: that of *Montage* as “...a critical counter perspective to dream and narcosis” (147). This montage technique is pervasively used by Gail Scott in *My Paris*, as elucidated in the following passage:

Crummy café around corner. Only crummy one in neighbourhood. Crushed mégots, butts on floor. Smoke. Mosaic of broken badly matched beige tiles. Shoes of workers dangling over. Drivers. Cleaners. Gophers. Working for Faubourg’s high-classed couturiers. Hotels. Restaurants. Making just enough to pay for tiny room. Rubber-soled shoes. Or pointy cowboy boots. Polished but showing signs of wear. Eye mesmerized by ray of light on beige stucco wall. It occurring to me. Ennui likely bad excuse. For indifference. Therefore pores exuding only *fake* ennui. As smokescreen. For warding off gossipy arrivals. (81)

The “mosaic of broken badly matched beige tiles” is itself a metaphor for the essence of the montage technique. To summarize some of the similarities between the Flâneur and the writer, I put side by side two quotes, by Maurice Blanchot (*Faux Pas*) and Jacques Leenhardt respectively :

I do not want to arrive at something, the writer says to himself. Instead I want this thing that I am when I write to come, by the fact I write, to nothing, under any form..... I want this possibility of creating, by becoming creation, not only to express its own destruction, as well as the destruction of all that it calls into question, that is

about everything, but also to not express it. It is a question for me of making a work that does not even have the reality of expressing the absence of reality...(Blanchot 7). Qu'il s'agisse de Berlin ou de Paris, le promeneur s'y trouve à la fois au-dehors et en dedans de lui-même. Il se meut dans une sphère où se rencontrent deux univers devenus totalement étrangers l'un à l'autre : le monde mélancolique des pensées du passant d'une part, le spectacle de la ville de l'autre. Telles deux masses d'air à charges contraires, ils s'entrechoquent en produisant, comme d'autant d'éclairs, des images. «Et comme, à mesure que j'avais, je sentais mes pensées dévaler ainsi en désordre en composant des motifs kaléidoscopiques-à chaque pas se dessinait une constellation nouvelle (...) » (Walter Benjamin 182).

Just like the writer who waits for something to happen in his writing, the flâneur is ever rambling without a particular purpose in mind. He just lets himself be absorbed by what is surrounding him.

In this chapter, I have sought to establish points of convergence between Gail Scott's style of writing and the theory of Benjamin, especially in relation to both the notion of *flânerie* and the illuminating thoughts that the term "passage" or arcade bears. *My Paris*, as a novel, can be considered as a "passage". Here, the term "passage" should be read in French so that one may see all of its quintessential and ontological meanings. As readers, we also make our entry into a "passage": a kind of transition which comes quite idiosyncratically in the form of a book, a diary in fact, which contains numerous entries and passages. These

passages are haunted by debris of thought, and these debris of thought are provided by the site/sight of a space charged with history. I have also tried to build a bridge between the two systems or dialectics of thought. This leads me to ask: which language does the Flâneur, the subject leafing through the pages of the novel, speak? I will devote my second chapter to deciphering and demystifying the language to which the Flâneur's state of mind lends itself.

By the same token, I shall attempt to figure out why the narrator chooses to articulate and gather his rambling thoughts together in such a form. Hence, I will be shedding more light on language in general, and style in particular.

## **Chapter II**

### **Language and Style in Gail Scott's *My Paris***

The first part will be devoted to language in general. Then, I will discuss the issue of the space that is importantly filled by language in Scott's novel. In this same part, I will show how these two literary components relate and respond to each other. From this, I will be inferring that language and space share a most disputed and coveted space so to say. Indeed, they seem to be constantly evolving in a see-saw relationship; they compel the reader to think in a dialectical, but ambivalent pattern. Language pushes space, but space also pushes language in such a way that each serves to heighten and highlight the other. In the exploration we are pursuing of language and the eroticization of space in *My Paris*, we shall gauge the overarching effects that language exercises upon space.

It is language that confers upon space its erotic feature. One very important factor which comes into *play* in this give-and-take relationship between language and space is *desire*. Desire slips in subtly between the two parts, in order to bond them together in the end. This process is also to be explained as we uncover all of the hazy areas. Play, desire, language and space evolve as if they were inevitably located within the folds of a prenuptial dancing space. They are definitely coupled together. In what way does language contribute to making space stand out and how does space help generate the element of literary space or *espace littéraire*? It would be reasonable and only logical to begin this analytical part devoted to language in *My Paris*, by showing its uses and its abuses. Are there abuses of language? If there is such a thing as an 'anomaly' or abuse of language, what is an 'abuse' at all? In contrast to what 'prior' form

of language did it emerge? Is it meant to represent a pure way of thinking and expressing/articulating thoughts? To what ends is language primarily used? I shall answer these different questions as we go deeper into the analysis and will rely, for the most part, on *Biting the Error*- one of my secondary critical sources- in order to alleviate some confusion or prejudice about what work language should be doing.

What is language expected to be? What is it expected to represent? To explore these questions, I shall also compare the status of the writer in the era of 'mainstream literature' to his/her status today, together with his relationship to his work. Has it changed dramatically? If yes, to what extent? And especially why? How close do writing and writer stand with regard to one another? That is an important question to bear in mind. To begin with, I will consider four books, always keeping *My Paris* at the back of my mind. I will always come back and refer to it. And most of all, I will try to bring the novel closer and closer to the theory, and not the other way round, that is to say: extract theory from the novel.

There is so much to be said about this part; one cannot exhaust all there is to be pondered. There is so much space to be occupied by the literary mind and in the same vein, there is so much language to be spoken in relation to this novel. Celia Hunt and Kevin Brophy's discussions of 'creativity' will be of a valuable help to me in order to make explicit what this is all about. Talk about creativity should come last as creative writing has become, just recently, an academic practice. It might well have been some kind of luxury to have a creative twist of

the mind, but when it comes to writing in the New Narrative Era, things do not function in the same way as they did in the past.

Lessons are given in creative writing. This is quite a challenging and enticing exercise. It calls both the mind's capacity to surmount and to go beyond its usual limits. I personally think that it is hard to be taught the secret of creation/creativity. On the contrary, this essence should be kept secret and not revealed. The secret of creative writing should remain something to fantasize about since it is erotic and brings desire within its dynamics. God is a creator, god is everything. When we started to deconstruct 'God' all the way down to 'god', he lost all capacity to appeal to abstraction in the mind of people; this came with Derrida's theory of decentering.

Now, in this process and clever exercise of *deconstruction* through an eternal *Différance* of the 'Real', evanescent thing, everyone can see god in a circle, or in a cup of coffee. That is creation, it is, I think, the power and eligibility of the human mind to detach itself from what it used to be and from what it used to think in order to leave more room for deconstructing and then 'constructing' anew. Consequently, deconstruction may be said to represent a giant leap towards the exercise of creativity. You have to be very good at the postmodern 'game' of deconstructing and causing things to fall apart, in order for you, one day, to witness the 'rebirth' of what you have burnt down.

To destroy all the premises that we have taken to be the one road leading to creative writing, we have to push aside all the 'ready-made' forms about creativity and 'good writing'.



In *The Ghosts of Modernity* Gertrude Stein has been quoted as defining 'genius' as a situation that involves *necessary idleness*: some sort of mindset in which you practically sit around and do nothing. That is when your mind is most efficient. This is the moment when genius steps quite surreptitiously into history. (78). (I am paraphrasing her) In practically the same vein, Kevin Brophy in *Creativity* deals with creativity from a psychoanalytical point of view. He talks about creativity with reference to 'the unconscious', implying that a writer reaches his/her utmost creativity and sense of pleasure when he writes his unconscious; indeed when he lays it right there on the page, as he would confide in a psychotherapist. He calls it 'the surrealist unconscious' (131). He even goes further in establishing a potential link with Freud when he suggests that the writer's psyche, while writing, is 'aléatoire'. The writer stands in an almost suspended stance from reality, far from the conscious mind which is kept at bay while writing, thus bringing us back to the Freudian theory. He quotes André Breton in *Genesis and Perspective of Surrealism in the Plastic Arts*:

The surrealism in a work is in direct proportion to the efforts the artist has made to embrace the whole philosophical field, of which consciousness is only a small fraction. In those unfathomable depths there prevails, according to Freud, a total absence of contradiction, a release from the emotional fetters caused by repression, a lack of temporality, and the substitution of external reality by psychic reality obedient to the pleasure principle and no other. Automatism leads us straight to these regions. (Rosemont 1978, 21).

So, what one gathers from this quote is that creativity in writing and pleasure definitely go together. In keeping with this, we can once again quote Kevin Brophy in *Creativity* when he talks about ghosts and the condition incumbent upon the existence of creative writing i.e. a condition without which creative writing would not exist. It is a question of heightened, extraordinary perception. It is about keeping a distance vis-à-vis the writer's work but never reaching out too far.

This seems to apply to the narrator of *My Paris* when she says : "Such a word means much more than it says, makes me, still alive, play a ghostly part, evidently referring to what I must have ceased to be in order to be *who* I am" (page 54). One may also wonder whether the state of authorship has been put at risk in this new perception of an 'other' narrative, another version of what is called the art of telling stories and narratives. Indeed, it is an in/version of the traditional formulaes that exist throughout the narrative. In *My Paris*, one has the impression that the narrator is engaging most of the time in a strong, intense visual experience and immediate relationship to the people and the things she refers to. This has a direct ripple-effect, and is reflected in the syntax and the morphological skeleton of the text. The following passage will help me underscore and highlight the importance of this aspect in the entry 55 of *My Paris*:

Cool and cloudy. Reading in paper about famous Kenyan athlete. Lacking visa like me. Jumping into Seine. To save elderly Frenchman. In act of suiciding. One month later Kenyan receiving *two* letters from prefecture. One citing bravery. The other

inviting him. To leave country. **Not** like you. S declaring on phone. Citing little incident. Witnessed in métro. Plump young white American with brushcut. Sitting on bench. Cop walking up. Vos papiers s'il vous plait, your papers please. He saying. To young African on left. Vos papiers s'il vous plaît. He reiterating. To veiled woman. Carrying baby. On right. Not a word to brushcut. (75).

The narrator here causes binary systems to fall apart, since the two parts that were to be semantically linked can still be separated /held apart from one another by a period. She is thus changing in a most daring way the grammar and the syntactic side of language. This is a stunt/an artistic feat. A period is like that platonic shadow which may give the reader the illusion that, mirage-like, it is needed to achieve a caesura a rupture/ coupure between things and units of meanings.

Actually, the period is only a simulacrum, since it still keeps two units of meaning sealed together. Just like the Kenyan whom she *reports* jumping into Seine, the narrator keeps on jumping directly, in a most nimble/ elegant way in and out of the heart of things, thus in the same way cutting, and even sometimes ignoring or brushing away, the romantic side that doesn't want to be silenced or totally discarded. It keeps popping out now and then in the text, taking the shape of eczemas or mushrooms-these are like an unwanted, importune presence, a persona non-grata, still they are incumbent on the very existence and ontological being of the narrative, resisting the narrator's intention to adopt an almost clinically-oriented style. Eczemas

and even orgasms become alien stylistic figures, inappropriate, dissonant with the general spirit of the narrative.

Orgasms may be crossed out, left out by the narrator through the system of *ratures* and the repression this embodies. However what is left out says more than it silences. Hence, a narrator that does and undoes herself, and a narrative that is doubled and nullified at the same time. Writing and un-writing point to the issue of the self and the paradigm of writerly tension/intention. When the narrator twists and bends structures and grammar to her wishes, according to the effect she wants to create in her readers' minds, she may be considered some kind of Lydia-like heroine, even though there is no notion whatsoever of heroes, in the traditional sense of 'épopées' or epic dimension ( her narrative is indeed divested of such a dimension). Instead, the narrative is fully grounded in an epoch where the dwellers are anti-heroes.

Manifestations of eczema are numerous and frequent in the narrative. They keep reappearing and vanishing as the 'diary' of the heroine of *My Paris* unfolds. Eczemas are known to dry up the skin and leave some pale skin, white areas on the skin, just like that narrative that may be, at times, the narrative suffering from gaps, blanks, 'unfillable' blanks, vortexes. This is consonant with the fact that such a narrative is called, in somewhat a vulgar way, a fill-in-the blank fiction. One can illustrate the fact that the narrator is writing in tension, just like the flâneur is experiencing a 'retour éternel' to the past, by quoting romantic passages

in *My Paris*. Eczemas equal *eruptions cutanées*, so they are *textual eruptions* whereas orgasms are, in the same spirit, sexual eruptions. The recurrence of eczema is most conspicuous in sentences that occur in different entries, such as in entry 84: 'Eczema getting worse' (*My Paris* 108), and in entries 88 and 89 : 'Eczema unbearable' (113), or also 'The sun which would help eczema' (113).

To say so much in so little space is an ambitious prospect. The spaces overflow with language, words; brim over with an excess of heteroglossia. Sentences overlap here and there, like bushes enmeshed together, borrowing from one another. Sentences that contain the word 'Eczema' quite singularly stand out in the paragraph-like entries. This suggests that such a leitmotif holds an importance and that we probably should pay special attention to it. When studying this kind of text, the reader who tries to analyze it finds himself adopting the same style. It is *contagious*. That is funny. It takes you unawares, by surprise as may be illustrated in the following: 'Face burning with eczema....Paris-funk. Don't buy. Don't buy face cream. Being unsure what kind. Stepping out door on side. *Facial splotches muted.*' (my emphasis added in italics, page 122 of *My Paris*). The last idea joins what I have been saying before: 'facial splotches' or eczemas, symbolize points of tension that are silenced, however strongly they thrust themselves over, or give themselves away to the writers. Eczemas exist between the lines : this expression should be taken literally, i.e. in its most straightforward sense. Eczemas and orgasms are survivors/ figures of survival, but they do little more than exist in the margins. Better still, they have managed to find a way into the text i.e.between the lines.

This is definitely a surgical type of writing in both senses: it takes an event, a vision, a person, a thing, a sensation and renders its specificity and immediacy in a most admirable, amazing way. The description is to the point, short, and well-targeted, but the narrator never seems to dwell on some item in particular. Instead, she just tells it, makes it exist with a rare precision. Her tour de force in adopting this style is to create what I refer to as *writing in stitches*. By this, I mean that periods function like surgical stitches (*points de suture*) that seal together the whole narrative. The survival of this otherwise bruised, cadaverous textual body depends entirely on the frequency of these stitches. This style is reminiscent of the style of the various texts to be found in *Biting the Error*. Stitches are the saving grace of texts. I love this bit; it is so telling about the narrator undertaking this task/’pari’ of writing the Paris she knows, the Paris she is both expecting and missing. As she puts it in *My Paris*: ‘The Paris I missing.’ (entry 52, page 72).

There is a dashing use of periods and dashes, especially in *le Sexe de l’art*. Gail Scott is letting some of her ‘secrets’ of writing transpire and come out through attributing speech to the narrator as she performs in the following passage:

...Analyzed, summed up in little captions. Offering for consumption: 19<sup>th</sup>-century subject. Waking post-Commune. Doubting reliability of species. Which doubt fostering “modern” psychiatric ward. Wherein master himself pacing. Narrating

someone else's dream. Being someone else's: even more impossible to pin down.

Resultant shock. To 19<sup>th</sup>- century mind. Ultimately spawning surrealism. (127).

Further down the same page, she goes on ' and "one"(implying 'she' in the first place) walking there near millennium. Mid countless objects representing point of convergence. Between 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. Feeling certain of genius. It being task of museum to make 'one' feel lucid' (127) It feels as though this bit were especially designed for the reader who wants to get the hang of it all, he who looks forward to disclosing the ontological function of the novel: here, in this little passage, is the gist.

In a way, this passage sums up what writing is about. I gather that what she wants the reader to get is that her writing is designed in such a way that there is no need to look for something to uncover, or for something beyond what is already on the page. And this is the trick: The trick is the absence of any trick , the trick ultimately resides in this deceptive technique: deceiving readerly expectations, the reader is led to believe that there is irony, or that there exists some mutant form of dramatic irony. This is dangerous to the evolution of the task and exercise of writing.

Creative writing came to the rescue at the right moment. As I have already suggested, it has taught readers and potential writers how to remove the shackles and the 'conditioning' process we are used to when it comes to the question of writing. It is a kind of rough writing, an unaffected kind of writing that reaches the essence, the kernel. By virtue of

being so, it is all the more challenging and enticing. *My Paris* can also be thought of as a synthetical, *imagined but not imaginary* Paris; imagined by the writer, synthetical because it reassembles all of the spare parts that form Paris of today, the Paris intended for the present, inclusive and all-encompassing. In this respect, space and language beautifully coincide. The Paris of the present has become a space the narrator has seen closely. She has discovered is not as the one she has read about in books, and about which she had developed romantic visions. Her Paris (we would in passim note and remark on the importance of the use of the possessive adjective) thus offers a possibility for subjectivizing space through a blend of memory and the present. Paris offers so many differences, possibilities for divergence and growth, *Language* follows this pattern since it, too, is very rich in alternative possibilities as it becomes a *site/space* for discovery and novelty.

In this section, I will analyse the elements of Space and Subjectivity and I will show how the act of playing is illustrated in the space of writing. I would like to begin by asking a question: do we have to act and think “cynically” in order to see the best in “us”? By this, I mean: does one have to torture him/herself, through the adoption of a confined, limited space, only to discover and get acquainted with one’s writing capacities?

The answer is not a simple one even though I personally have the feeling that the less space we are granted, the better our writing performances. Granted, this claim may sound nonsensical and even contradictory, it is nonetheless to be borne in mind because of its very challenging quality.



If one had to consider this issue under a different light, we would quite confidently assert that human beings in general have the propensity to come up with efficient results when under pressure and stressful conditions. We sort of need to be stirred on by tension. This calls to mind the S/M, sadomasochist trait. We become all the more sadomasochistic as we quasi revel and fall into ecstasy by virtue of preferring circumscribed, claustrophobic spaces over spaces and “sites of writing” which are turned loose, and thus unfettered. Unconsciously, we have come to internalize a vital condition incumbent on the advent/ existence of the act of writing: We should put the stretches of our imagination to the test by creating frames and limits for ourselves.

In this part, I will examine the diverse ways in which language mirrors the yearnings of one's sex. I will also demonstrate that a ‘metanarrative’ or ‘hypertext’ is produced only through a search for an alternative way of expression and self-assertion. *Desire*, in this respect, will serve as a guiding light to analyzing Scott's text as a modern representation of space. Language has almost become a possession. *My Paris*, as the title itself suggests, is an appropriation of space. This space is now conceived of mentally and reflects the desire which is tightly linked to language. Gail Scott is also trying to write ‘the Paris’ she had in mind, thus relating to space through time, memory and nostalgia. However, is not the writer at the same time attempting to reconstruct a new space for memory?

One should not lose sight of the fact that experience is unique by dint of its being peculiar to the writer. No doubt, Gail Scott is recollecting individually the condition of being in Paris, yet it is at the same time aimed at striking a chord in the collective memory. Some sites

and attitudes will be recognized and shared by everybody who lived in, or at least had the chance to visit Paris once in their life. The way Scott presents Paris to us is striking insofar as we have a hard time trying to decide upon the temporal sphere in which she sets her pseudo-actions and expresses her feelings. One is tempted to ask the following question: Did Gail Scott write *My Paris* as she was living there or did she just store all her reactions and write upon them retrospectively, in the form of reminiscences, after they languished for a while?

The point I want to make at this stage is how it is virtually impossible for a writer, no matter how close she is to the immediacy of her experience, to squarely coincide with the present. Why should experience logically take place prior to writing? One potential reason for breaking sentences down into words, where sentences end up being supplanted by mere torrents or streams of words, may be ascribed to the constant desire to capture the present moment and recent, immediate sensations in the best possible way.

To my mind, the sentence, once uttered and set on a sheet of paper, is already and almost systematically relegated to the realm of the 'bygone', a past sphere in time. It reaches for some sort of completion, which reflects the satisfaction and self-complacency of the author, and which encourages the reader to move on to what is next. She will not look back on the sentence or question its existence or meaning.

We are a culture of massive sentences. It feels as though we are a society conditioned to writing and talking in full sentences. We are sentence seekers. Besides, sentences

that are so syntactically and semantically perfect/impeccable are dead and vanish the very moment they are produced. With reference to the particularly interesting and engaging section of *My Paris*, entitled “Le Sexe de l’art,” one might argue that a sentence writes the orgasm, it confirms its existence. A sentence reaches an orgasmic apex whereas words never do, they instead attempt breathlessly to grope for lost impressions. One may infer that a sentence tends to live more in the past, while a word and by extension a phrase, will be likely to live in the present and in the future.

In *My Paris*, words seem to be closer than sentences to the present- a present which is hardly accessible to human sight and feelings. Words are thrown in the wind, they are dispersed and scattered all over the page. Indeed, they hold a certain truth to them and though there seems to be grammatical errors or incorrect syntax, words and phrases do strongly relate to each other across the ‘punctus’, that seemingly disruptive ‘period’. Words travel all over the page in a whirlwind fashion, trying to relate since they are after all units of meaning. This creates the vortex phenomenon and at the same time, culminates in the creation of a hole in the whole. This hole brings me once again to talk about the feminine and the quest for fashioning one’s sexuality through the text. Text is in this respect a site where desires are to be met. May be the Paris that Gail Scott thinks and fathoms never existed except in the deepest recesses of her mind. Words also never stop haunting the page, they keep re-emerging in our cognizance/consciousness. Words are attached against all odds to each other.

Sentences write off desire, words create desire. No sooner do we come across another word, an impression amongst many, than we already are looking to go back to the one before, trying to distill its essence and construct for it a subjectivity of its own. Paris is evasive both in time and space, it has never ceased to exist in between, being deeply entrenched in both the present and the past, caught in between two centuries, epochs, the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup>. It is a space that is desperately trying to affirm its modernity through its very historical remnants. In her style of writing, Gail Scott tries to do the same: to build novelty upon repetitive patterns, the already-existing. This is also where the secret of fashion comes from, reworking ancient things, never departing from 'before'. A helpless, human need to be faithful, to cling to a point of reference even though we feel a desire to break free from pre-existing moulds and frames or fetters.

So is it a lack of a better word for a term meaning more than modern, that has led to the imperfect appellation 'post-modern'? Postmodernity, however, seems to be about building upon something before. Novelty is never divorced from the past. Modernity and the past are not contradictory terms, they complement each other instead. One can never escape the primal origin, even if we seek to do so through experimental writing and exploring 'other' areas. Paris is that elusive object of desire. Deferring itself in psychoanalytical terms, Paris can ultimately be gotten to and nailed down through an act of appropriation. This is where Scott's tour de force lies. Only through calling it *My Paris* will it bend to the wishes of the writer and deliver its myriad meanings. Paris is like that slippery, 'insaisissable' kind of thing, a viscous

and gelatinous substance that is always difficult to handle because it flees its very threatening existence.

Besides, for Gail Scott, writing seems to exemplify some sort of a 'bet' on the whole process of narrativity. Indeed, the space which is devoted to writing becomes, in the end, a space for discovery, in which the narrator attempts to play with the diverse potentials attached to the idea of writing. For this reason, the notion of 'play' is no less important than the notion of 'narrativity'. In this sense, the idea of play implies paltering with the grammatical rules which are set by the patriarchal system. *My Paris* is about scanning all varieties of impressions. It stands as a very inclusive sort of literary project, as the reader is constantly called upon to take in everything in view. Perhaps, it is we, who have to be selective by visualizing the aspects the writer talks about in her writing. Hence, the modern element of interaction between the writer and the reader. A work is produced- in the fashion of a joint venture- through a dialectical relationship between writer and reader.

As to Gail Scott's style of writing, the narrator is derailing language but she is in no way misrepresenting it. Scott refers to Baudelaire and Colette respectively as B and C, as though they were close acquaintances. She is de-essentializing them in order to better write and circumscribe their subjectivities. The style of writing is also rather memo-like, like writing some notes or a minute diary. One may wonder what is the point of or rationale behind proceeding in this way? The 'Nouveau Roman' has already been created; now we live in another age that demands that we create another style of writing altogether by adopting a new

texture in the text. Another important fact worth commenting upon is that when we read canonical works such as Proust's and his contemporaries, we feel some kind of awe, we have to feel that we are in some way inferior to the god-author. With Proust, we would dash through the long sentences that he beautifully pens, holding deep inside the expectation that implicitly we will find a period, a quest for a period in the end, an end in itself. The period had an aura about it; it was infrequent.

Now, the period lost its prominence as it is frequently asked for. Now the use of dashes- as in *Le Sexe de l'art* in *My Paris*- is very recurrent. Orgasms write themselves off. Gail Scott uses a strongly sexualized language: her text is in quest of itself (textual) and its sexual identity. Illustrations of this almost mechanical incorporation of sex within language occur in a section of *My Paris* entitled *Le Sexe de L'art* whereby orgasms keep appearing but crossing themselves off, thus denying the possibility of surviving through writing. Another instance is: 'the raising(erection) of the cross' (98), which is interestingly enough, to be found inside of a paragraph wholly written in italics and which is 'penned' in the most traditional way of writing, including complete grammatical sentences containing nouns, verbs and complements. For the most part, the verb does not exist in the text; indeed, the verb as a masculine creation seems to be no longer held in prominence. One may even go so far as to say that the verb is phallic.

Gail Scott has thus to find novel ways to express her ideas. There is no action, just states of being, descriptions of states of mind, which are considered typically feminine. *My Paris* tells us right from the beginning that it is going to be subjective, i.e: related to the realm

of feelings and emotions. The reader may even find it somewhat provocative to read such a book because as we have stated before, Gail Scott is taking everything in view through the ever-inclusive technique she adopts in writing. Focusing on syntax is also very important: style has become a crucial space through which a writer can claim his or her idiosyncrasies. Gail Scott's writing may be thought of as an androgynous one since it is operating all the way through as some sort of duplicity, searching in this way for a definite, conclusive voice. However, it keeps oscillating between the past and the present spheres. This can be considered parallel to the idea that Scott's writing is caught up between the ghostly presence of the past and the present as a temporal entity ripe with desires of escape and lines of flight.

Moreover, one has the impression that there is a constant overlapping between the spheres of time. Paris and its archaic nineteenth-century buildings, tries to exceed its own limitations and break free from its imposed 'fetters'. In addition, *space* is gendered in *My Paris*: Paris a woman. (99). One might further suggest that the somewhat hazardous enterprise of experimenting with the device of language- which consists in the freedom to manipulate and toy with language- entails some points of tension. Among these, one may question the existence of characters. However, it would be more appropriate within the context of *My Paris* to refer to them as 'subjects' rather than characters. Gail Scott seems to be dealing with all the minutiae of a scene in a montage-like technique, via which there emanates a painted harmony. The narrator notices everything, from the presumably least important things to those holding a larger order

of importance. As such, she subtly manages to abolish hierarchy and smooth all surfaces. Such a sensation is conjured up/conveyed in *My Paris* in the following passage:

Sauce made of butter (margarine)/flour/onions. Or their juice. Two cups “milk” (C naturellement substituting crème fraîche). Cooked on double boiler. Also sometimes peas. Poured over toast. Snow likely falling. Or- nighthawks. Diving into heartbreaking pink Paris skyline. Beyond C’s high terrasse. Accompanied by suitably light Beaujolais. Endless cigarettes. Taking in strange reflective quality. Of the air of Paris. A synthesis of Gothic spires. Flexed domes. Gold leaf. Iron. Glass. Floating like mirages (73).

As we can gather from the above quote, Scott’s intention is to construct an evasive subject through its very multiplicity. Furthermore, the narrator makes use of letters rather than names, thus neutralizing the effect of naming, in the biblical sense of creation. The inhabitants of the book’s world are B’s, C’s, P’s and X’s.

This is devised in such a way as to question the utility of having a subject named. What is also conspicuous in the iconoclastic system of writing employed by Gail Scott is the frequent use of bold face, italics and capital letters. All of the heretofore- mentioned aspects culminate in the deconstruction of the ‘heliocentric’ model of writing.

However, a category of readers who would stand more on the side of anti-feminism will dismiss this style of writing as not only delirious but also full of garrulousness. They would qualify it as



a hemorrhagic type of writing: a writer who is having her period on the page, hence the use of so many periods.

The book as such may be thought of as either a travelogue or a diary full of entries which function in an almost random way. The whole process contributes to producing an 'aleatory writing'.<sup>2</sup> The aleatory aspect which characterizes Scott's writing is reinforced as the latter is delivered in the form of scribbled 'notes' which are ultimately woven together. In the post-modern era, and in particular within the framework of narrativity offered by *My Paris*, every small scenic detail is 'falling over eye' (Scott 99). This is perhaps designed in such a way as to suggest that with the advent of post modernity, things come to you. They invade the writer's vision or worldview. Indeed, it is an era in which action or plot hardly matters. The object of desire now comes to the fore, it thrusts itself forward and wants to be described and spoken about, thus constructing its own existence and subjectivity. Pursuing our enquiry of this stylistic issue in postmodern writing, I am tempted to ask the following: what if we replaced 'Scottian' dots, so to speak, or 'punctures' with slashes? What would the implications be? I personally think that in doing that, *My Paris* would resemble more a piece of poetry than a work of fiction in prose. The reader would be engaged in an exercise of reading a long poem which would have been transcribed horizontally, in a linear way, on the page.

This factual assumption leads me to question the imaginary 'frontier' that exists between prose and the language of poetry. Writers in the post-modern era, however, have the

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<sup>2</sup> This term has been used by Gail Scott in an article entitled *The Virgin Denotes or the Unreliability of Adverbs to Do with Time*. This article is to be found in *Biting the Error* to which I have referred throughout my thesis.

propensity to connect more easily with the flowing, stream-of-consciousness rhythm of poetry, thus creating and reinforcing what is going to be labelled in the anterior future:

The 'New Narrative' tradition of writing.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, one subversive aspect of modern writing is that there is no clear divorce between prose and poetry. Moreover, the use of French words and phrases side by side with the English text denotes, simultaneously, the ambivalence and complementarity between the two languages, both politically and culturally.

Gail Scott also draws a lot on Gertrude Stein who uses punctuation in a different way; she relies heavily on the comma which demarcates a ground of cleavage in the process of translation, whereas Gail Scott, in *My Paris*, attempts, at least, to rehabilitate the status of the French language by incorporating it almost naturally in the English-written text.<sup>4</sup> A great deal of words in Scott's text are uttered in French and do not need to be supported by their English equivalents. We may conjecture that the narrator wants to 'recuperate', as it were, the feelings, images, sensorial pictures and impressions in their original context and form. This ideal of recollection can not be dissociated from its offshoot: Nostalgia. This same nostalgic drive towards the past creates desire to travel to a precise, future moment in the past. I want to point, here, to the fact that the future is almost inevitably kept hostage to the past.

If we now turn to syntax as being one of the basic components of style, we will stop, amazed, at such 'novel' sentences as: "While we". (100) in *My Paris*. This sentence is

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<sup>3</sup> This expression has been coined by Robert Gluck in his article *Long Note on New Narrative*. This article is also to be found in *Biting the Error*.

<sup>4</sup> This idea has come to me after reading Gertrude Stein's *Paris France* and Gail Scott's *Spaces Like Stairs*.

ostentatiously ungrammatical. Nevertheless, what do we really need grammar for? Certainly not to express our ideas or speak our minds as much as to show to the world that we hold a certain amount of education and cultural merit. In light of this argument, grammar may be thought of as superfluous since, without it, anybody might as well convey meaning in the most rudimentary and *fragmented* way and yet, be perfectly understood. Besides, the way we come to use language- thus indulging in different types of discourses- is quite telling of our being placed within a certain socio-political framework. However, a point of rupture or break from *convention* in its broadest sense, is never completely achieved. As a matter of fact, an underlying complicity with convention always remains. At this stage, we might significantly point to a distinction between belonging to the stabilizing sphere of the past- this includes the reassuring figures of B. i.e.: Walter Benjamin and Gertrude Stein- and longing to capture and distil the essence of the object of desire.

*A sentence, after all, is a device like anything else*<sup>5</sup>. I find this sentence to function like a teaser, in that the post-modern literary tenet claims that sentences are now supplanted by sequences of words. It seems that the function of the dot in experimental writing has shifted from indicating the end of a unit of meaning to indicating *Différance* in the Derridean sense. By this I mean that the dot promises to transcend its classical meaning of completion and looks forward, beyond its physical presence on the page, to other deferred meanings. Marcel Proust was obviously not a fervent advocate of periods. As an emblem of classical and canonical

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<sup>5</sup> I refer you to the closing sentence in Gail Scott's article *The Virgin Denotes Or the Unreliability of Adverbs to Do with Time*. It is to be found on page 19 in *Biting the Error, Writers Explore Narrative*.

writing, he would knit his sentences together in an almost interminable way. By the simple act of dipping the Madeleine into his coffee, the central character would access the past. Now with the emergence of post-modern writing, the reader has to immerse him/herself thoroughly into space so as to be able to experience *cognitive mapping* and especially to capture the spirit of the epoch. There is also an incredible fusion of space, time and characters which is created all through *My Paris*.

Indeed, all these elements are beautifully woven into one another. If we were to address the question of rhythm in this text, we would find out that a certain type of music is created thanks to words rapping, falling in a 'staccato' way onto the page. Gail Scott in *My Paris* also describes physical settings and examines the myriad impressions which are felt by the reader or *the Flâneur*. "London lacking geometric order. Palaces planted. Without regard for symmetry" (Scott 98). So, is not writing in general 'supposed' to achieve- on a stylistic and aesthetic level- a sort of geometric order and symmetry? Perhaps, these two factors will lead to "feeling morally superior" (101) as an artist. In fact, from the point of view of a reader, there are always higher expectations as far as a work of art is concerned. We do quite unconsciously envision a model of writing which, ideally, should be based on both symmetry and geometric order. This literary conventional mould allows us to experience some sort of complacency. Sometimes, the narrator feels "cheated. Having seen nothing elating" (101). A desire to express a lot more than what is already there on the page, arises in the form of *spleen*, or *ennui*. This

ennui may result in a certain ‘désinvolture’ or deliberate disinterestedness with regard to what an ideal model of writing should be like.

While reading *My Paris*, the reader becomes acutely sensitive to the sense of sight.

The writer relates so powerfully to the different things she is holding in view. In the scanning process that is much akin to an eye-camera technique, Scott draws particular attention to women: “... Mostly prostitutes. Majority addicts. Forty-five per cent HIV-positive. Some having babies. Touching camera work. Following women “out”. Trying to make a life.” (108). Another textual instance allows us to witness that there is a subtle ‘mélange’, or promiscuity, between text and sex:

an L-shaped room. Lesbians on short side. Straights on the long. Gays floating between. Transsexual Catherine. Small nipples visible under burgundy silk shirt. Faint moustache. Dancing cheek-to-cheek with fags. Tall slightly pregnant parisienne. Head thrown back. Black dress over small round stomach(72).

In addition, there is the ‘eczema’ motif which is recurrent in *My Paris*. “Making philosopher more interesting. Because simultaneously negating and substantiating own discourse. For being unbuttoned. Meaning something. In appearance-conscious Paris. *Eczema getting worse.*” (108). The eczema motif can be interpreted in a Lacanian light since it may be said to stand for this

*desire* of itching that is hardly attainable and which constitutes an unrealistically 'erogenous' zone.

In considering the question: Is there an 'origin' to writing? , one must take into account both the issues of novelty and repetition. Can writing spring from a vacuum? Are there novel writings or new narratives, or are there just re-workings of previous models? To my mind, one should not conceive of novelty in a radical way as the element of *nostalgia* is always part of the process, even though we claim to be innovative. Therefore, there is no 'big-bang' phenomenon of writing. There is almost always the fear of departing or straying from a pre-existing point of reference. What is left is a simulation of new beginnings and new trends. Post-modern literary trends are in a way a repetition of modern patterns of writing but with variations. Now, it is all about the creation of cracks, points of rupture, holes in the whole.

The modern conception of an author has also undergone noticeable change. Now, we come to conceive of an author *obliquely*; he/she steps off his pedestal and engages in a more realistic way with the reader to create and confer meaning on the text. Therefore, it remains very hard to begin from scratch. It is all the more difficult to pretend to write with a 'virgin', absolute conception of things as we have naturally been influenced by writers before us. This fact points towards the denial of the existence of a primitive way of writing. The stylized kind of writing that prevails in *My Paris* seems to be devised in a marked way especially through the use of exclamation marks for instance. Sometimes, writing betrays itself by giving away its subtleties: "But a writer can only write. What she knowing." (104). The act of writing holds

another basic and unique virtue which is the exceptional ability to turn back the hands of time through the revival of the past in the site of memory and nostalgia. In a way, the act of writing in the post-modern era outlives itself. Moreover, Lianne Moyes points to the exterior discontinuity of the text as evidence for its inner harmony.<sup>6</sup> We witness no middle in this plotless narrative. There is only beginning and ending. We are thrown from the first into the mood of the book. It feels as though we need no intermediary.

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<sup>6</sup> Lianne Moyes points to this fact in the book *Gail Scott: Essays on Her Works*.

## **Conclusion**

### **Language and the Erotic or Desire**



As we have seen, *play* in *My Paris* constitutes an important element which can be directly derived from desire itself. However, *la jouissance* in writing is dangerous as it is an ephemeral feeling, running the risk to be crossed out, as in the last pages of *my Paris* where the word “orgasms” keeps appearing and disappearing, waxing and waning. The very transcription of the word itself gives us the impression that even though this slip of the tongue is deliberate, it is presented in the form of an error. It is as if we are made- as readers- to understand that it is the unconscious that speaks out but then withdraws into silence through the mark of writing, of crossing out, or *rature*. This *rapture* or orgasm is constantly being bitten<sup>7</sup>, silenced and repressed in fact. Orgasms also may be thought of in this respect as akin to the leitmotif of the phrase “eczema getting worse” mentioned earlier in the narrative process. The word “orgasm” keeps popping up as in this sentence: “Still what *orgasms* angels popping up” (Scott 155).

My concern has been to try to define desire in relation to the space of writing. Contrary to Gertrude Stein’s detractors, we will consider the term “monstrous” as defined by Foucault in postmodern discourse. In this regard, Lisa Ruddick states:

Stein's experimental texts are, I would still say (and on the same grounds), *anti-patriarchal* in their potential effects; for their *actual* ideological effects, however, they depend on something beyond their *explosive stylistic innovations*, namely, the social and institutional frameworks that mediate the experience of readers. Does Stein's *linguistic jouissance* really

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<sup>7</sup> In choosing this word, I am implicitly referring to the phrase ‘biting the error’ which is by the same token the title of the same book.

pulverize the mental processes that structure patriarchal thinking? (my emphasis, 1)

Desire has two functions. There is an “anti-patriarchal” desire to impose one’s identity, a feminine desire to “create”, to be creative, and to displace rules and “transgress”. Ruddick, for example, speaks about Stein’s “aesthetic transgression”. To take liberties with language is to transgress the rules set by the patriarchal system, to break the habits. Ruddick also shows that there is also desire to innovate, to create anew, to write a new hi/story: a new story that from the margin(especially in the case of Getrude Stein seen as a monster fat big lady and whose lesbianism was hidden. In fact, it is through an act of transgression in writing that one can ensure desire and legitimate its existence, since transgression presupposes desire, the desire to go against the grain.

Catharine Stimpson is interested in studying the personal and especially the literary portrait of Getrude Stein as a modernist. She explores how Stein conceives of the female body as a site of pleasure and how she succeeds in imposing her “innovative literary accomplishments” (642) onto the literary scene. According to Stimpson, Stein was of course far more than the fat lady of a *Bohemian* circus. She was a *serious* modernist, whose *formal experiments* were as *radical*- if not more so- as those of any other modern writer.

The fact that her work *provokes* so much *ridicule* and *anxiety* is one mark of *her radicalism*. Not even Stein’s most ardent detractors can dismiss her, try though they might. I tend to agree with Stimpson regarding the fact that the reader has to transcend the idiosyncratic style peculiar

to Stein and the even more modern elaborate style of Scott in order to be able to measure the extent to which their literary experiments will be successful and bear fruit.

Indeed, one has to suspend belief for a while and be willing in the course of the reading exercise to be penetrated by innovation and style and go beyond what seems at first glance to be weird and “eccentric”. This is quite a challenging exercise, as Stimpson suggests, but it is worth a try in the context of an experiment. The ridicule she mentions may appear to be justified if the reader stops only at the meaning. If she does not see beyond it, she will see the text as ridiculous, nonsensical and even absurd at times. However, if she attempts to look at other aspects such as the semiotic, or a system of signs/sounds produced especially in language poetry and prose, it will be hard to dismiss this style as ridiculous or as lacking the literary merit of the canon. In Stein and Scott, there is a strong alliance between the body and the literary activity. The importance of linking the body to the text is apparent when Stimpson writes, speaking of Gertrude Stein: “Her body also enlivens her writings, be they somagrams or not, be they lyrics, meditations, or diary-like notations.” (646). The word “somagram”, a neologism indeed, may sound cryptic at this stage at first glance. However, Stimpson explains it in the first part of her article. Inspired by Nietzsche in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, it refers to the mind more than it does to the body and conjures up the fact that somagrams consist of writing your body in the text by means of a strong alliance between the body and the soul or the mind. Conversely, one can also write the mind through the body of the text, the text in this case forming the body,

the matter as it were: *Bodies that matter* to use Judith Butler's phrase. Therefore, somagrams are the product of a "ghost-ridden language" (642), as Catharine Stimpson implies.

I now turn to a number of striking similarities between *My Paris* and *Tender Buttons*. In *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism*, Judith Ryan displays a powerful insight into demonstrating the real essence of power that characterizes *Tender Buttons*:

There is one extraordinary work of Gertrude Stein's, however, in which the focus is more closely on the object. This is her experimental text *Tender Buttons* (1912). Its striking title gives a first hint of the focus of this text: one in which objects subsist only in their interaction with the subject. *Tender Buttons* is a complex exploration of the intentionality of consciousness and the intricate shadings of attention. At first glance it appears very similar to the second, synthetic phase of cubism, which emphasized *the power of creative subjectivity by juxtaposing facts and slivers of objects not always intrinsically related to each other*. (My emphasis added) (93-4)

What is striking here is that the apparent anarchy and chaos-which are exemplified by the random combination of all sorts of incongruous objects and facts - also represent a potent characteristic of Scott's writing. In fact, the narrator of *My Paris* has a highly "porous" mind

quality. When she walks through the streets of Paris, she registers in quite an inclusive fashion a multitude of facts and impressions. However, what she sees has a peculiar impact on her mind, hence the question of perception which is otherwise referred to by Judith Ryan as “the intentionality of consciousness and the intricate shadings of attention.”

There are also many resemblances between *Tender Buttons* and some erotic instances in Scott's *My Paris* and in *Spare Parts Plus two*, where the interstices of language are penetrated by desire, eroticism, and sensuality. Some detractors of this innovative style may take it for an absurd, even meaningless kind of writing, but on the contrary, it is close to the physicality of things through its subtle use of metonyms rather than metaphors. These work as symbols inside a semiotic system, as spatial signs that are harbingers of something larger. They wait to be deciphered by the reader, thus entering into an interactive reader-response dynamic. The reader is now more of an active participant, completing the work in duet with the writer.

Catharine Stimpson also draws our attention to the important aspect of orality, which may be said to characterize the language-poetry. As is the case with poetry, one has the impression that the sense of words can be grasped and lived fully only when they are uttered or read aloud. Speaking about Gertrude Stein, she writes: “for her texts read as if her voice were in them, as if she were speaking and dictating as much as writing.” (647). This fact can hold true with respect to Gail Scott's *My Paris*. In fact, terms such as “reading” and “dictating” emphasize the aspect of immediacy and freshness that characterize her writing so to speak. This

immediate rendering of emotions makes Stein create (an)other kind of tense: the present *sensual* tense. This, again, helps undermine and at the same time goes against the idea of Stein's so-called "opacity", or the inaccessibility of this kind of prose. Stimpson makes me think of Gail Scott in *My Paris* when she says: "The best writing is energized by speech, and the best speech surges forward like a wave... In poetry, writing is not the same as speech, but is transformed by speech..." (Vernon 1979:40). Here, speech contains the element of spontaneity and a free-flowing rhythm of all sorts of random feelings and emotions. Most importantly, as has been suggested above, it transforms writing.

Likewise, in *My Paris*, meaning is not central to the assessment of the whole novel, but ideas do subtly start to acquire some deeply sought-for meaning through orality. Indeed, the moment the reader acknowledges the impact of words, he becomes suddenly aware of something on display, unrolling before his eyes. Then and only then will he be able to see the novel almost as a film, a montage. Then and only then can he feel and experience what Roland Barthes calls "the pleasure of the text". Catharine Stimpson beautifully describes this unique experience of becoming aware of beauty, of becoming word-conscious, aware in fact of the role language plays in real life: "Stein's work is liveliest when read and heard; when our own oral talents lift her words from the page and animate them in an informal or formal, private or public, theatrical experiment." (646). *Desire* again is present when we take words from the page: their prison, and set them free throwing them to the wind, when we elope erotically with words so that they become music and poetry at the same time. In the marriage between body

and soul in Gail Scott's *My Paris*, the author throws herself into the space of the Paris she sees, smells and touches. This is not only an immersion into the cultural "bath" that is Paris but is also and most importantly, an act of appropriating Paris for her personal experience: "Paris I missing" (72), or "not the Paris I was expecting", I would also like to point that these examples point to the fact that the ultimate object she wants to meet is escaping her memory and recollections, it wants to be ever deferred according to the principle of la "différance" de Derrida, it is happening but at another, otherwise deferred moment, not the moment in which she is speaking. The Paris she is missing, and which she wanted to have in mind is popping out each now and then. When it is finally there, we get a synthetic image of it, in the end, after we finish reading. Then all those scattered bits and pieces and spare impressions come together in a final jigsaw or puzzle: the crowning moment.

Paris keeps sliding, slipping through her fingers. her sensorial grasp or senses always though mentioning it with nostalgia, that is where nostalgia comes into play i.e: referring to paris in the past, missing I was expecting, paris this object of desire, elusive, aerial built of memories sensations and feelings, never reaching up to her expectations or desire. From the above quote one gathers that desire comes into play in the space of literature and is even part of language itself, an erotic language and style always unexpected, enticing through the element of surprise, thus veering away from usual, conventional paths. One never can be sure or know what the next sentence or couple of words will be, since they always adopt a teasing style that works against expectations, following an anti-climactic vein. However, the notion of climax

itself could be questioned, as New Narrative does not tell a story in the classical sense. Instead it gets in and out of stories without ever having the *intention* of either beginning or finishing a single one. In a spiralling fashion, it jumps, or leapfrogs on another, as I have shown in my second chapter. Desire prevails in the text: the desire to be the receptacle of everything, of every sound and action, to englobe everything and to be penetrated. The text, the site of writing itself, is the space for a literature in-the-making.



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